

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 211133Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE 7204

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 12712

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, LE

SUBJECT: COMMENTS BY SOVIET EMBASSY OFFICER ON LEBANON

1. DURING CONVERSATION SEPT. 20, POLOFF IN SOVIET EMBASSY CAIRO TOLD EMBOFF THAT MOSCOW NOW MAKING CONCERTED EFFORT TO INDUCE PRESIDENT ASAD TO ADOPT MORE EVEN-HANDED STANCE BETWEEN PLO AND CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON. SOVIET POLOFF CONCEDED THAT SOVIET POLICY RE SYRIAN INTERVENTION HAD BEEN INCONSISTENT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS, BUT NOTED THAT CURRENT MOSCOW THINKING SEES SYRIA AS ONLY VIABLE ARBITER OF LEBANESE DESTINIES AND, THUS, SOVIETS TRYING A LITTLE FRIENDLY PERSUASION IN HOPES THAT EVENTUAL SARG/PLO COMPROMISE WILL END FIGHTING.

2. SOVIET POLOFF STATED THAT MOSCOW HAD TAKEN LONG TIME TO REALIZE WHY SYRIANS HAD INTERVENED IN LEBANON AND TO GET OVER SHOCK AT INITIAL SYRIAN MOVE, POSSIBLY TIMED TO
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COINCIDE WITH APRIL 1976 VISIT TO DAMASCUS OF SOVIET PRIMIN

KOSYGIN, BUT NOW UNDERSTANDS THAT COMBINATION OF SARG FEAR THAT DOMINANT LEBANESE LEFTIST/PLO BLOC MIGHT TRIGGER ISRAELI INTERVENTION WHICH WOULD DRAW IN SYRIANS, LED TO MASSIVE SUPPORT OF CHRISTIANS BY DAMASCUS. SOVIETS NOW BELIEVE THAT BASIC SYRIAN NATIONAL AIMS FULLFILLED IN LEBANON AND THAT SYRIAN INFLUENCE WILL CONTINUE PARAMOUNT SHOULD FIGHTING CEASE. ON OTHER HAND, MOSCOW FEARS THAT, BY CONTINUING TO BACK LEBANESE CHRISTIANS UNSWERVINGLY AGAINST NOW-WEAKENED PLO, SARG RISKS NOT ONLY ITS "PROGRESSIVE" REPUTATION THROUGHOUT ARAB WORLD, BUT ALSO INTERNAL DISSOLUTION UNDER CONTINUED SHOCKS OF PROTRACTED WAR IN LEBANON.

3. SOVIET POLOFF NOTED THAT MOSCOW NOT VERY OPTIMISTIC RE SPEEDY END TO LEBANESE FIGHTING, BUT SOVIET EMBASSY CAIRO, AFTER WHAT PERCEIVED TO BE FAILURE OF TALKS IN CAIRO ON LEBANON, DURING PAST TEN DAYS, INCREASINGLY CONVINCED THAT SYRIANS ONLY GAME IN TOWN AS FAR AS LEBANON CONCERNED. THUS CURRENT MISSION OF GENEVA MEPC CO-CHAIRMAN VINOGRADOV TO DAMASCUS APPARENTLY AIMED IN PART AT URGING SOME SORT OF ACCOMODATION WITH PLO UPON RELUCTANT SARG. SOVIET POLOFF ALSO STATED THAT SOVIETS CURRENTLY ALSO URGING ACCOMODATION WITH SARG UPON PLO LEADERSHIP. (COMMENT: POSSIBLY THIS WAS BASIS OF TALKS DURING RECENT VISIT OF PLO POLITICAL DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN QADDUMI TO MOSCOW.)

4. COMMENT: SOVIET POLOFF IS ARABIST WHO HAS SERVED TOUR IN BEIRUT AND IS CONVERSANT WITH LEBANESE REALITIES. HE STATED THAT SOVIET EMBASSY BEIRUT SCARCELY FUNCTIONING AND MOSCOW INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED BY LACK OF CLEAR READING ON LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS. SOVIET EMBASSY CAIRO ATTEMPTING TO PICK UP SOME OF ANALYTICAL SLACK RE LEBANON, ESPECIALLY DURING RECENT VISITS OF KARAMI, GEMAYEL, ET AL, BUT PERVASIVE SOVIET FEELING THAT EGYPTIANS HAVE NO ROLE TO PLAY IN LEBANON LEADS MOSCOW TO LEAN HEAVILY ON DAMASCUS CONNECTION. MATTHEWS

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